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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted using 292 sixth-graders (aged 12) and 301 eighth-graders (aged 14) from nine comprehensive schools in Joensuu, Finland to examine the effective properties of closed and open English vocabulary tasks in individualistic and cooperative learning situations. The report is based on a larger study "Situation- and Task-Specific Motivation in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching," which investigated the relationship between trait and state motivation. The students performed three open and three closed English vocabulary tasks in three different learning situations (individualistic, cooperative, and competitive). The students' pre- and post-task appraisals and attributions were recorded by means of an on-line motivation questionnaire immediately before and after each task. Closed tasks seemed to produce more success assessments while open tasks tended to give rise to failure assessments (i.e., students are more liable to perceive themselves as failures in open tasks than in closed ones). The cooperative situation produced more success assessments than the individualistic situation. High achievers did well in both open and closed tasks, however, low achievers tended to perceive themselves as failures in the open task in the individualistic situation. Contains 45 references. (GLR)

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AFFECTIVE PROPERTIES OF OPEN AND CLOSED VOCABULARY TASKS IN INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING SITUATIONS

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The article focuses on the affective properties of closed (Three of a kind) and open (Categories) English vocabulary tasks in individualistic and cooperative learning situations. The paper is based on a larger study investigating the relation between trait and state motivation in FL learning. The subjects of the study consisted of 292 sixth-graders (aged 12) and 301 eighth-graders (aged 14) in comprehensive schools in Joensuu, Finland. Open tasks seem to be more liable to failure experiences than closed ones. This does not, however, hold for the cooperative situation. Feedback is supposed to have a decisive role to play students` result assessment.

1 Introduction

This paper is based on a larger study "Situation- and task-specific motivation in foreign language learning and teaching", which investigated the relation between trait and state motivation (Julkunen 1989). The subjects of the study consisted of 292 sixth-graders (aged 12) and 301 eighth-graders (aged 14) from nine comprehensive schools in Joensuu, Finland. The students performed three open (Categories) and three closed (Three of a kind) English vocabulary tasks in three different learning situations (individualistic, cooperative and competitive). The students` pre- and post-task appraisals and and attributions were recorded by means of an on-line motivation questionnaire immediately before and after each task.

This paper focuses on the effects of open and closed tasks in the individualistic and cooperative situations. The students` self-reported success/failure, differences in intended (SiSAT 1) and realized (SiSAT 2) situation specific action tendency are the main concern here. Differences between low and high achievers are also covered.

Since the 1970s an increasing interest in considering the learning experience from the student`s perspective has developed.Effective teaching is now seen as providing students with appropriate activities and tasks to do. The increasing variety

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of learning activities (group work, computer assisted learning, games etc.) makes it necessary to analyse and study the characteristics of the activities used in the classroom. (Kyriacou 1987, 2-3)

Moreover, Bennett (1987,213) has recently pointed out that time and involvement are no longer considered as sufficient conditions for learning. Instead, the interactions of students and tasks within the complex social setting in the classroom should be the focus of research.

In the Finnish context with uniform syllabi and centrally controlled textbooks, teaching materials, single tasks included, might be the easiest way of affecting what goes on in the classroom.

2 Learning Tasks

In foreign language teaching a task syllabus has been proposed. Task-based language teaching would be based on a needs analysis of the tasks students should be able to master. The tasks would then be classified into task types, out of which pegagogical tasks would then be derived. Pedagogical tasks refer to the tasks and activities administered by the teacher to the students in the classroom. The selection and grading of pedagogical tasks makes up the task syllabus.(Long 1985, 93-94; see also Richards and Rodgers 1986,75)

Another syllabus proposal that makes classroom activities and tasks the constitutive principle and core of the syllabus is the process syllabus. It implies that the language content of the syllabus/curriculum would largely be derived from the activities, operations and tasks suitable for the age group in question. The activities and tasks would include games and operations such as sequencing, classifying, matching etc. (Tongue & Gibbons 1982) Regardless of the syllabus type, curriculum and instruction culminate in student tasks, which, in turn, decisively influence how and what students learn from instruction (Winne 1987,497). Student tasks largely structure what information is selected from the environment and how it is processed, i.e. they organize student experience (Doyle 1983,161; Bennett 1987,209).

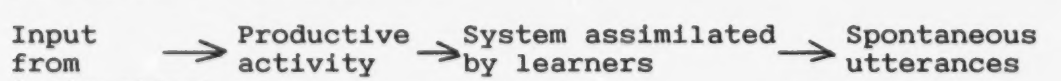
In order to study the cognitive and affective effects of academic tasks a classification of tasks has to be developed. Task categories can be based on the cognitive operations that are involved in doing the task, i.e. memory tasks, procedural or routine tasks, comprehension or understanding tasks, opinion tasks etc. (Doyle 1983,162-163, see also Tongue and Gibbons 1982 above) In the context of foreign language teaching and learning , an endless variety of task types would have been available, e.g. reception vs production, grammar tasks, reading tasks, skill-getting vs skill-using tasks, pre-communicative vs communicative tasks etc. However, a very general, simple and comprehensive division into open and closed tasks

was adopted for the present study. In a **closed task** a precise, single right answer can be defined in advance whereas in an **open task** there is no one single right answer but every student may produce a unique response within his/her competence (Barnes 1969; Doyle 1983, 182-183; Wright 1987,49)

The division of tasks into closed and open ones is here justified because it is to be expected that they will result in differring appraisal processes in students. A closed task is high in risk, especially for less able students, since failure is easily detectable. Open tasks, however, are low in risk because several right answers are available. Yet, it is difficult for the student to establish the criteria for success/failure in an open task. (c.f. Doyle 1983,183) Moreover, highly anxious students should benefit from structured (closed) tasks demanding little processing capacity (Tobias 1986,48). Finally, open tasks are more flexible in that they allow the student to use his/her whole competence in performing the task. For instance, in vocabulary tasks the student may resort to the extra curricular words that he/she has acquired outside school.

3 On Language Learning

Communicative language teaching can be pinpointed by referring to two models: the creative construction model and the skill-learning model. The former emphasizes language acquisition, i.e. language competence is achieved through using language communicatively instead of relying on practising language skills. The latter views the acquisition of communicative competence as a case of skill development. The model can be presented as follows:



(Littlewood 1984, 73)

The use of a foreign language is a performance skill, which involves both cognitive and behavioural aspects. The cognitive component refers to the internalization of plans for creating appropriate behaviour. As for language use, these plans include structural rules, procedures for selecting vocabulary, social conventions etc. The behavioural component refers to the automation of these plans, resulting in fluent performance. This takes place mainly through productive practice. (Littlewood 1984, 74)

Due to the hierarchial nature of language use, students are required to perform tasks, each of which is made up of sub-tasks, which in turn are composed of sub-tasks etc. Each of these tasks needs a plans for its performance. However, the parts of the target performance can be practised separately (i.e. pronunciation, structural rules, vocabulary, language functions). The principal form of learning is the gradual

assimilation of the components of the system, which can be consciously guided. (Littlewood 1984, 75-76)

The skill-learning model is more applicable to formal language teaching but elements of the creative construction model can also be included in the classroom context (cf. Krashen & Terrell 1983)

4 Learning and Teaching Vocabulary

Acquisition of vocabulary is an integral part of learning a foreign language. Words constitute the major meaning carrying element in language. A good command of vocabulary is a prerequisite of communicative competence. (Paulston & Bruder 1976,-168; Robinett 1978,133; Wallace 1982,9; Carter & McCarthy 1988,44-46.)

Vocabulary is not a random collection of items but it is composed of a series of interrelated systems. Consequently, vocabulary should be presented and practised systematically. Systematizing or internalizing vocabulary should be given an appropriate role in language teaching Semantic fields or lexical sets, i.e. words forming categories of similar items provide one convenient basis for internalizing vocabulary. (Gairns & Redman 1986, 69; Palmberg 1986,19.)

The words in the long-term memory form a kind of mental lexicon, which seems to include at least a phonological system, a system of meaning relations, and a spelling system. Semantically related words form associative networks. Once you get to a category, e.g. `fruit`, the other fruits are easy to recall. (Gairns & Redman 1986,87-88.)

Native speakers acquire their vocabulary in a more or less coherent fashion but they have more time to build up their mental lexicons than foreign language students. In foreign language learning students should be systematically helped clarify associative networks, classify by categories etc. in order to enhance the learning process. (Gairns & Redman 1986, 89.)

The exploitation of mental lexicon in vocabulary learning is essential because the learner`s mental lexicons in language one and language two resemble each other and he/she can establish semantic, phonological and associative links between them (Carter & McCarthy 1988, 16; Channell 1988, 93). The lexicon is assumed to be an independent unit in processing. Consequently, vocabulary can be practised separately, i.e. without integrating it into communication (Channell 1988, 94).

Meaningful activities and tasks promote language learning, vocabulary learning included. Retention of verbal input is enhanced if the learners work on tasks involving semantic processing (Gairns & Redman 1986, 90-91). The latest trends in

vocabulary teaching have stressed the need to help learner to learn, to provide them with tasks of analysing and organizing lexicon, and to personalize vocabulary expansion (Carter & McCarthy 1988, 49).

5 Motivation

In the classroom context motivation can be seen as a continuous interaction process between the student and the environment (c.f. Ladousse 1982, Solmecke 1983, Nuttin 1985). It can be conceptualized either as an impulse arising from the organism or as an attraction arising from an object outside the individual (Nuttin 1985,15). Motivation does not only affect the selection and conceptualization of a specific goal in the beginning phase of an activity. Its main role is in controlling and directing the activity. In directing and coordinating various operations towards an object (goal) motivation transforms a number of separate reactions into significant action. Learners build up object-directed means-end structures, such as tasks, plans, projects, intentions, and interests (Nuttin 1976, 127-128).
The above implies that situation or task level motivation should be studied in three stages: the initial stage, the actual performence stage, and the evaluation stage (cf. Hennig 1978, Nuttin 1985, Boekaerts 1987a and 1988, Winne 1987).

6 Situation Specific Motivation

Situation specific motivation (short-term motivation) refers to the motivational state in a given situation. According to Boekaerts (1987a,32-33, 1987b,212) the learner`s general motivational orientation, motivation as a trait and situation specific motivation, motivation as a state, interact and produce the situation specific action tendency (SiSAT), which denotes the learner`s readiness to devote his/her personal resources, i.e. time, energy, competence, to completing a task (c.f. Maehr 1984,122). The content of situation specific action tendency is mainly determined by appraisal processes.

Boekaerts (1987a, 1987b) has applied to the learning situation the cognitive appraisal processes outlined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 31-37) in their cognitive stress theory and Zajonc`s (1980) peferenda, i.e. the stimulus features according to which an individual distinguishes, recognizes and categorizes objects and situations (see also Hoffman 1986,250-255). Appraisal processes categorize encounters with respect to their significance to an individual`s well-being. They can be divided into primary and secondary appraisals. The former are subconscious and can be exemplified by the question "Am I all right or in trouble?". The latter refer to conscious `cost-bebefit analys`, which can be illustrated by the question `What if anything can be done about it?` To answer this question an individual must evaluate the situation in relation to his/her coping resources, and decide on a coping strategy.-

The situation gives rise to outcome expectations and self-efficacy expectations, i.e. a given behaviour will produce a certain outcome and one is able to reach the outcome. (Bandura 1983, Lazarus and Folkman 1984, Boekaerts 1987b)

Although the above appraisal processes are primarily associated with stressful encounters where an individual`s well-being is threatened, Boekaerts (1987b) assumes that the framework can be applied to learning situations as well. In fact, foreign language learning offers threatening situations, especially to low achieving students. In the classroom context the appraisal processes are biased, i.e. each learner has had different learning experiences and has learnt to classify learning situations, tasks, content areas, even school subjects etc. in different ways. High and low achievers have their characteristic appraisals, and there are also age-related differences.(Boekaerts 1987b; c.f. Maehr 1984,123, Olkinuora et al. 1988)

As stated above, the student`s motivational orientation (in this context instrumental, integrative, and cognitive orientation) and State motivation are expected to interact and produce the situation specific action tendency. State motivation, in turn, is affected by the learner`s cognitive abilities (competence) and task demands, as perceived and conceptualized by the learner, and his/her emotional states before task performance. As a result, the learner has a notion of the attractiveness, difficulty level, personal significance, own competence in relation to the task and his/her eagerness to participate in an activity. After task performance the learner assesses his/her performance (result assessment) and attributes success or failure to ability, luck, task difficulty etc. (Boekaerts 1987a and 1987b)

When task characteristics are the focus of attention in situation specific motivation, the term **task motivation** can be used. Gagné (1985,307) views task motivation as one of the three major types of motivation (the others being incentive and achievement motivation). Referring to Ausubel (1968) he notes that the motives are intrinsic to the task, and the completion of the task satisfies the underlying motive.

Task motivation refers to the characteristics of the task, to task design. Maehr (1984, 137) points out that certain tasks are more interesting, more attractive, and more motivating than others. Tasks that include an optimal amount of uncertainty and unpredictability attract the learner. Language games are a point in case.

7 Individualistic and Cooperative Learning situations

In studying situational motivation, the nature of the learning situation has to be considered because it has a distinct

impact on motivation. Individualistic, cooperative and competitive learning situations affect differently motivation, goals, task behaviours and performence assessment (Ames 1984, Dweck 1985, Johnson & Johnson 1985). Here competitive situation is excluded because it largely resembles the individualistic situation in its motivational effects (Johnson & Johnson 1985, Julkunen 1989)

Motivation to learn emerges from interpersonal processes, which are determined by the mutual social interdependence arising in learning situations, from prior experiences and ongoing interpersonal influences. Other individuals provide the purpose, the meaning, and the support for learning by giving approval, and by respecting one another`s academic achievements. In interaction with other learners individuals learn to appreciate learning for its own sake, to enjoy learning, and to be proud of their accomplishments. (Johnson & Johnson 1985, 249-250.)

Social interdependence, originating from Deutsch (1949), is the key concept that separates the social situations from one another. In the individualistic learning situation there is no interdependence, which results in no interaction, which in turn tends to lead to extrinsic motivation, low expectations for success, low commitment to learning, and to low task persistence. The cooperatve learning situation is characterized by positive interdependence leading to promotive interaction, which results in intrinsic motivation, high expectations for success, high commitment to learning, and to high task persistence. (Johnson & Johnson 1985)

According to the results obtained within this tradition, cooperative learning experiences, in contrast to individualistic ones , seem tc give rise to increased motivation because learning is fun. Meaningful feedback, which is provided by collaborators in cooperative learning situations, also increases intrinsic motivation as compared with the individualistic situation.(Johnson & Johnson 1985)

Subjective probability of success within a cooperative learning situation tends to be high. Even low achievers can contribute to the effectiveness of the group. They view themselves and their collaborators as competent group members. The amount of effort available to goal acievement is greater than in an individualistic learning situation, which directly affects expectations for success. (Johnson & Johnson 1985)

Moreover, the two learning situations have different impacts on commitment to academic achievement and learning. Commitment covers such factor as belief in the value of learning, willingness to invest effort to learning, positive attitude towards the subject being studied, and enjoying the actual learning experience. Cooperative learning experiences seem to affect learner attitudes to the subject studied and to the instructionmal experiences more positively than the individualistic situation. Learners tend to be more involved in the

activities and tasks, view learning as more important and have less disruptive behaviours. (Johnson & Johnson 1985)
The more committed the learner is toward doing the task the more task persistence he/she will demonstrate. Again the cooperative learning situation seems to promote greater task persistence than the individualistic situation. (Johnson & Johnson 1985)

Finally, cooperative learning experiences seem to produce higher achievements than the individualistic learning experiences. According to a meta-analysis carried out by Johnson et al. (1981), the above generalization holds for all age levels and school subjects, and for tasks requiring concept formation, verbal and spatial problem solving, categorization, retention and memory, motor performance, and guessing-judging-predicting. (Johnson & Johnson 1985)

Good and Tom (1985,316-319) criticize Johnson and Johnson`s (1985) theory and the supporting evidence for being a little too optimistic, i.e. biased toward cooperative learning. They point out that impression management rather than altruistic interest in group performance might be operating in cooperative situations as well. Further, in the classroom situation teachers do not always rely on one single goal structure (situation) but may use a combination of them, thus making it difficult to predict the consequences. Finally, Ames (1984,-196-197) notes that there is evidence suggesting that some of the positive consequences of cooperative learning may be attributed to group outcome. When the group fails, low contributors tend to be judged negatively. Nevertheless, neither Johnson & Johnson nor Good & Tom seem to take into account the impact of the actual tasks on motivation etc. It may be reasonable to assume that task characteristics have a role to play across the situations.

8 Results

Self-reported success and failure in different tasks and situations are presented in Table 1, which demonstarates that closed tasks seem to produce more success assessments while open tasks tend to give rise to failure assessments, i.e. students are more liable to perceive themselves as failures in open tasks than in closed ones.

Table 1. Distribution of Self-reported Success and Failure by Task and Situation

Task	Individualistic		Cooperative	
	Failure %	Success %	Failure %	Success %
Closed task	29	71	14	86
Open task	46	54	18	82

As for the two situations, the cooperative situation produces definitely more success assessments than the individualistic situation. The difference between open and closed tasks is hardly noticeable.

Table 2 presents the **self-reported success/failure assessments of low and high achievers.** The table shows that closed tasks seem to give rise to success assessments, as stated above. However, this holds only for high achievers, who did well also in the open tasks, though the difference was not so striking. The low-achieving students tend to perceive themselves failures in the open task in the individualistic situation.

Table 2. Distribution of Low and High Achievers as Successes and Failures by Task and Situation

Task	Individualistic		Cooperative	
	Low	High	Low	High
	%	%	%	%
Closed task				
Failure	52	7	31	4
Success	48	93	69	96
Open task				
Failure	64	33	34	11
Success	36	77	66	89

The cooperative situation produces more success experiences in both groups than the individualistic situation, regardless of task type.

Figure 1 illustrates **changes in situation specific action tendency in low and high achievers.** These changes are assumed to demonstrate the impact of the task and task performance on the students. In the individualistic learning situation high achievers` changes are positive, particularly in the closed task. In the cooperative situation all the changes are definitively positive, i.e. the cooperative situation is experienced as more positive by the students regardless of task type.

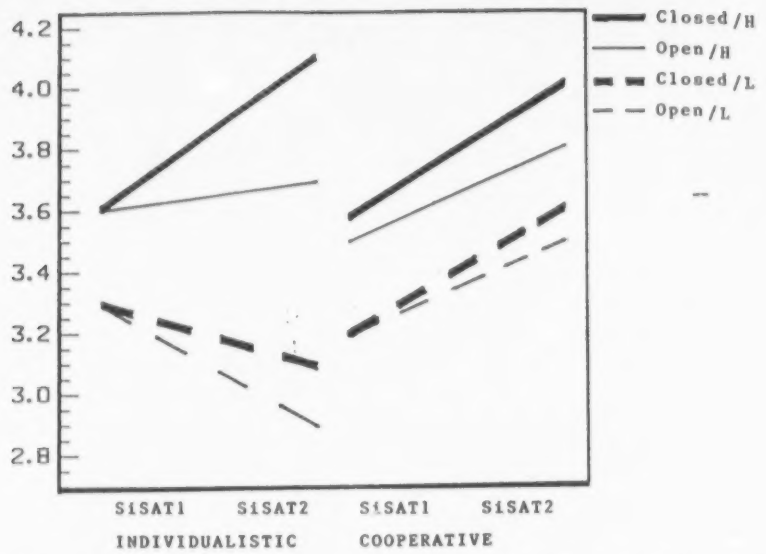


Figure 1. SiSAT 1 - SiSAT 2 Changes in Low and High Achievers by Task and Situation

9 Discussion

Open tasks seem to produce failure assessments in the students. This is, however, partly explained by the fact that students did not get immediate feedback from their performance, i.e. they had to decide independently on success and failure in the tasks. Naturally enough, it is easier to assess one's result in a closed task. On the other hand, a student may have produced a high score in an open task but he/she has no definite criteria for result assessment.

The above difference between open and closes tasks did not hold for the cooperative learning situation, where it may be easier to establish criteria for success/failure because there are (in this case) two or three contributors to the final score. The group can provide the necessary feedback. The positive influence of closed tasks did not cover low achievers, who nevertheless seemed to benefit from the cooperative situation. On the whole, the cooperative situation seems to give rise to more favourable student responses (cf. Johnson & Johnson 1985).

The above refers to the decisive role of feedback in the learning process. Students are accustomed to getting feedback from the teacher. Yet, it is impossible for the teacher to provide optimal individual feedback in the normal classroom context. Therefore, students should develop internal criteria for success/failure to be independent of the teacher. This might be accomplished by relying on open tasks and cooperative learning situations in instruction.

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APPENDIX

On-line Questionnaire

Name_____
Class_____
School_____

Questions before doing the task
Circle the number that best describes your opinion.
Note: 1= I definitely disagree
2= I quite disagree
3= I do not know
4= I quite agree
5= I definitely agree

Example

Travelling is fun	1	2	3	4	5

STATEMENTS

1. The task seems to be interesting	1	2	3	4	5
2. I think I can do the task					
3. I am eager to begin the task					
4. I expect to learn from the task					
5. I think the task is difficult for me					
6. I feel curious about the task					
7. I am anxious					
8. I am glad					
9. I am distressed					
10. I am sad					
11. I am angry					
12. I want to use my time and skills in doing the task.					

When you have done the task, circle the number that best describes your opinion.

Note: 1= I definitely disagree, 2= I quite disagree, 3= I do not know, 4= I quite agree, 5= I definitely agree.

STATEMENTS

1.	I persisted with the task	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I concentrated on the task					
3.	I am satisfied with my performance					
4.	I am glad about my performance					
5.	I am anxious					
6.	I found the task interesting					
7.	I am satisfied					
8.	I feel angry about my performance					
10.	I feel distressed about my performance					

Did you succeed in the task ? Yes____ No____

If your answer was Yes, complete the following:

I succeeded because of		1	2	3	4	5
competence						
effort						
luck						
interesting task						
task enjoyment						

If your answer was No, complete the following:

I failed because of		1	2	3	4	5
lack of competence						
lack of effort						
bad luck						
stupid task						
task disenjoyment						

OPEN TASK

Categories 1

Write as many English words as you can remember in the boxes below. The columns indicate the category of the words and the rows indicate the initial letter of the words. Two examples have been provided.

	People (e.g. relatives, professions)	Animals
B		BEE
C		
D		
F		
G	GRANDFATHER	
M		
S	--	
T		

CLOSED TASK

Three of a kind 1

6 th grade

The words below are arranged into three columns. Connect each of the words in the first column with two related words in columns 2 and 3, one word from each column. The purpose is to form chains of three related words. Indicate your word chains by placing the number of the word in column 1 before the related words in columns 2 and 3.

	1		2		3
1	arm		bed		orange
2	black		good		picture
3	tea		cousin		mouth
4	banana	1	tooth		horse
5	eye		dog		stamp
6	trousers		airport		sofa
7	uncle		white		blue
8	today		ear	1	foot
9	street		apple		violin
10	orchestra		coffee		milk
11	postcard		film		jacket
12	chair		concert		bridge
13	cat		tomorrow		flight
14	plane		road		aunt
15	nice		gloves		yesterday
16	program		letter		lucky